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Maine Small Business Person of the Year to Travel to Orlando to Compete for National Honors SBA Expo '04, Conference Will Take Place May 19-21

WASHINGTON – Mark S. Awalt, the Small Business Person of the Year award winner from Maine, will travel to Orlando, Fla., next month to compete for honors as the National Small Business Person of the Year at the U.S. Small Business Administration's *SBA Expo '04: Celebrating National Small Business Week*.

Awalt, Co-Owner and Vice President of JSI Store Fixtures, exemplifies the business expertise, commitment, creativity, and community involvement sought in the selection of one of the nation's top entrepreneurs. JSI, in Milo, a manufacturer of display fixtures for the supermarket industry is the town's largest private employer with 60 employees.

The annual celebration honoring the nation's leading small business entrepreneurs will be held in Orlando May 19-21, 2004, at the Orange County Convention Center. The announcement of the National Small Business Person of the Year award is one of the highlights of *SBA Expo '04*. *SBA Expo '04* is co-sponsored by SCORE "Counselors to America's Small Business," a proud resource partner with the U.S. Small Business Administration.

"I am very proud of all of our state winners, and I look forward to meeting them in Orlando at *SBA Expo '04*," SBA Administrator Hector V. Barreto said. "*Expo* is our chance to honor the contributions of small businesses to our economy and our nation, and to help entrepreneurs take the next step in building their businesses.

"We've packed a lot into a three day conference, from educational sessions to a town hall meeting to roundtable discussions to a session of our tremendously successful Business Matchmaking. We expect as many as 3,000 small business owners to attend. I think that every one of them will be glad they came when they see the chances for learning, networking, acquiring government contracts, and identifying ways to grow their businesses."

The Business Matchmaking event will be a significant element of *SBA Expo '04*. Business Matchmaking allows small business owners the chance to schedule one-on-one meetings with buyers from federal, state and local governments as well as larger corporations, cutting through the red tape that is too frequently part of the federal contracting process. In other Business Matchmaking events held across the country, more than 4,000 small businesses have participated in more than 14,500 one-on-one meetings.

Another key event will be the Women in Business Breakfast, a special event honoring some of the nation's best and brightest women entrepreneurs. These women represent the changing face of entrepreneurship and range in service from a construction firm to a shoe designer.

Interested small business owners, business organizations, and other individuals may find additional information, including online registration for *SBA Expo '04* events, at www.sba.gov/50.

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